

VII. Truth and Falsehood

The *Sophist* on Truth and Falsehood: Between Aristotle and Frege

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In the *Sophist*, the Visitor and Theaetetus agree that to judge (or state) falsehoods is to judge (or state) the things which are not. It is because judging (and stating) the things which are not is allegedly impossible that the dialogue's central section embarks on a painstaking examination of not-being. It is therefore puzzling to realize that at the point of the dialogue where they examine false judgement (and false statement) as an episode of judging (and stating) the things which are not, the two inquirers agree that falsehood can also be present in a judgement (or statement) that judges (or states) the things which are: in an affirmative false judgement (or statement), the cognizer (or speaker) posits that the things which in fact are not, are; but in a negative false judgement (or statement), the cognizer (or speaker) posits that the things which in fact are, are not. The puzzlement has two reasons: first, one gets the impression that the account of false judgement (or statement) as judging (or stating) the things which are not is supposed to cover all cases (rather than, roughly, half of them); secondly, if, at least in some cases, a false judgement (or statement) judges (or states) the things which are, the possibility of false judgement (and statement) is not threatened by the difficulties that bedevil not-being so that much of the central section of the *Sophist* turns out to be pointless. A passage of the *Parmenides* solves the puzzle by showing that the cases of false judgement (or statement) which in the *Sophist* are described as judging (or stating) the things which are should also be regarded as judging (or stating) the things which are not. It is likely that the reasoning explicitly presented in the *Parmenides* lies behind the puzzling argument of the *Sophist*: in the latter dialogue, Plato moves very quickly and offers only scarce signposts of the argumentative route fully expounded in the former one.

I. Two puzzles about falsehood and not-being in the *Sophist*

The Sophist on falsehoods concerned with the things which are. Here is the passage of the *Sophist* where the Visitor and Theaetetus allow for the possibility that false judgement and false statement could be concerned with the things which are:

T1	ΞΕ.	Tί δὲ δή; τὴν τέχνην αὐτοῦ τίνα ἀφορίσαντες ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς συμφωνεῖν οἷοί τε ἐσόμεθα;	240c7
ΘΕΑΙ.		Πη̄ καὶ τὸ ποιόν τι φοβούμενος οὔτω λέγεις;	
ΞΕ.		“Οταν περὶ τὸ φάντασμα αὐτὸν ἀπατᾶν φῶμεν καὶ τὴν τέχνην εἶναι τίνα ἀπατητικὴν αὐτοῦ, τότε πότερον	d

ψευδῆ δοξάζειν τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν φήσομεν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκείνου	
τέχνης, ἢ τί ποτ' ἐροῦμεν;	
ΘΕΑΙ. Τοῦτο τί γὰρ ἀν ἄλλο εἴπαιμεν;	5
ΞΕ. Ψευδῆς δ' αὐτὸς ὁ δόξα ἔσται τάναντία τοῖς οὖσι δοξά-	
ζουσα, ἢ πῶς;	
ΘΕΑΙ. Οὕτως τάναντία.	
ΞΕ. Λέγεις ἄρα τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζειν τὴν ψευδῆ δόξαν;	
ΘΕΑΙ. Άναγκη.	10
ΞΕ. Πότερον μὴ εἶναι τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζουσαν, ἢ πως	
εἶναι τὰ μηδαμῶς ὄντα;	e
ΘΕΑΙ. Εἶναί πως τὰ μὴ ὄντα δεῖ γε, εἴπερ ψεύσεται	
ποτέ τίς τι καὶ κατὰ βραχύ.	
ΞΕ. Τί δ'; οὐ καὶ μηδαμῶς εἶναι τὰ πάντως ὄντα	5
δοξάζεται;	
ΘΕΑΙ. Ναί.	
ΞΕ. Καὶ τοῦτο δὴ ψεῦδος;	
ΘΕΑΙ. Καὶ τοῦτο.	
ΞΕ. Καὶ λόγος οἴμαι ψευδῆς οὕτω κατὰ ταῦτα νομι-	10
σθήσεται τά τε ὄντα λέγων μὴ εἶναι καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα εἶναι.	241a
ΘΕΑΙ. Πῶς γὰρ ἀν ἄλλως τοιοῦτος γένοιτο;	2

Visitor: What about this? By offering what definition of his [*sc.* the sophist's] art will we be able to be consistent with ourselves?

Theaetetus: How do you mean? What do you fear in speaking thus?

Visitor: When we say that he deceives us about apparition¹ and that his art is one of deception, shall we say that our soul judges falsehoods because of his art? Or what shall we say?

Theaetetus: This: for what else could we say?

Visitor: And a false judgement will judge² the contraries of the things which are. Or what?

1 Cf. Pl. *Sph.* 234e7–236d4.

2 I translate 'δόξα' by 'judgement' and 'δοξάζειν' by 'to judge'. While the English 'to judge' cannot take as its grammatical object a noun-phrase denoting what a judgement it describes is about (if you say 'I am judging her', you will be taken to mean not that you have a judgement that is about her, but that you are conducting an evaluation of her, for instance in a trial), 'δοξάζειν' does allow a construction of this sort. McDowell 1973, 194–5 addresses this issue and decides to render some occurrences of 'δοξάζειν' by 'to judge', others by 'to have in one's judgement'. But it is preferable to keep a single translation of all occurrences of 'δοξάζειν' and pay the price of an awkward use of 'to judge'. A similar point holds with respect to the Greek verb 'λέγειν', which I translate by 'to state'. 'Λέγειν' can take as its grammatical object a noun-phrase referring to the thing

Theaetetus: Yes, the contraries.

Visitor: Do you then say that a false judgement judges the things which are not?

Theaetetus: Necessarily.

Visitor: By judging that the things which are not are not, or that the things in no way are somehow are?

Theaetetus: It must judge that the things which are not somehow are, if anyone will ever somehow err even for a short time.

Visitor: And does it not also judge that the things which in all ways are are in no way?

Theaetetus: Yes.³

Visitor: Is this then also a falsehood?

Theaetetus: This too.

Visitor: Then, I think, a statement will also be regarded as false in the same way, by stating that the things which are not and that the things which are not are.

Theaetetus: How else could it come to be such [sc. false]? (Pl. *Sph.* 240c7–241a2)

The train of thought in passage T1 is straightforward. At the beginning (240d6–10), false judgements are described as judging the things which are not. But then (240e1–9), while the description of false judgements as judging the things which are not is retained for judgements that portray what they are about as being, i.e. for affirmative false judgements, false judgements that portray what they are about as not being, i.e. negative false judgements, are described as judging the things which are (for, if they were to judge the things which are not, they would be not false but true). A similar account is offered for false statements (240e1–241a2).⁴

Passage T1 contains several bare occurrences of the verb ‘to be’, i.e. occurrences where the verb is not followed by any complement. These occurrences can be understood in four ways. (1) The verb ‘to be’ could have existential force. In this case, after claiming that false judgements judge the things which do not exist, the passage would maintain that there are two types of false judgements, namely those which concern the things which do not exist and judge them to exist, on the one hand, and those which

which a speech-act of stating is about: if someone makes a statement about you, in Greek one can say that he or she *λέγει* you (cf. LSJ s.v. *λέγω* III 2, 3, and 9a). In this respect, the English ‘to state’ behaves differently from the Greek *λέγειν*. I am allowing myself to treat the English ‘to state’ as if it could tolerate the same construction as its Greek counter-part.

3 The adverbs that accompany forms of ‘*εἰναι*’ (‘*πως*’ at 240e1 and e3, ‘*μηδαμῶς*’ at e2 and e5, and ‘*πάντως*’ at e5) are probably indicators of the strength with which claims are affirmed or denied: cf. Crivelli 2012, 61.

4 Several commentators agree on this reconstruction of T1’s train of thought: cf. Owen 1971, 260; Movia 1991, 237; Fronterotta 2007, 330–2; Crivelli 2012, 59–62.

concern the things which exist and judge them not to exist, on the other. (2) The verb 'to be' could have veridical force. In this case, after claiming that false judgements judge the things which are not the case, the passage would proceed to hold that alongside the false judgements which concern the things which are not the case and judge them to be the case, there are also those which concern the things which are the case and judge them not to be the case. (3) The relevant occurrences of 'to be' might express the relation that obtains between kinds and what falls under them.⁵ In this case, after claiming that false judgements judge the things which are not *«about their referents»*, the passage would go on to hold that some false judgements concern the things which are not *«about their referents»* and judge them to be *«about their referents»*, whereas others concern the things which are *«about their referents»* and judge them not to be *«about their referents»*.⁶ Finally, (4) we might be faced with the predicative-elliptical use of the verb 'to be'. In this case, after stating that false judgements judge the things which are not *«so-and-so»*, the passage would go on to declare that while some false judgements concern the things which are not *«so-and-so»* and judge them to be *«so-and-so»*, others concern the things which are *«so-and-so»* and judge them not to be *«so-and-so»*. Different readings have been adopted by different commentators.⁷ It cannot be excluded that one of these uses could be operative at the beginning of the passage and another one later, or that the account is intentionally vague.

The main puzzle posed by the Sophist's account of falsehood in terms of not-being. Passage T1 poses two puzzles, a main one and a secondary one. The main puzzle has to do with the passage's acknowledging a case of false judgement that is concerned with the things which are.

One reason why this is puzzling is that the claim that false judgements judge the things which are not seems to cover all false judgements. This is the impression one gets at the beginning of T1, especially at 240d9–10. The impression is confirmed by a passage later in the dialogue:

5 This 'converse' use of 'to be' plays a role in Plato's final account of false statement, at 262ell–263b13.

6 I take the referent of a statement (or judgement) to be the entity to which the statement (or judgement) refers: for instance, the boy Theaetetus is the referent of the statement performed by uttering the words 'Theaetetus is sitting'.

7 For references, cf. Crivelli 2012, 66.

T2	ΞΕ.	Μὴ μειγνυμένου μὲν αὐτοῦ τούτοις ἀναγκαῖον ἀλληθῆ πάντ' εἶναι, μειγνυμένου δὲ δόξα τε ψευδῆς γίγνεται καὶ λόγος· τὸ γὰρ τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἢ λέγειν, τοῦτ' ἔστι που τὸ ψεῦδος ἐν διανοίᾳ τε καὶ λόγοις γιγνόμενον.	260c
			4

Visitor: If it [sc. what is not] does not mix with them [sc. judgement and statement], it is necessary that they be all true, while, if it mixes, false judgement and statement come to be: for to judge or state the things which are not – this, I suppose, is falsehood coming to be in thought and statements. (Pl. *Sph.* 260c1–4)

Passage T2 straightforwardly and explicitly identifies judging falsehoods with judging the things which are not, and stating falsehoods with stating the things which are not. It does not contain the slightest hint that its description of falsehood in judgements and statements as concerned with the things which are not could have a restricted application. In particular, it does not in any way suggest that it could hold only for affirmative judgements or statements.⁸

Another reason why T1's acknowledgement of a case of false judgement concerned with the things which are is puzzling is that it seems to render the *Sophist*'s long examination of not-being unjustified. For, if some false judgements are concerned (not with the things which are not, but) with the things which are, defining the sophist in terms of falsehood does not require examining not-being.⁹

One might be tempted to solve the main puzzle by claiming that the reason why the description of false judgement as judging the things which are not can be retained for negative judgements is that negative judgements,

8 Other passages in Plato's works describe false judgement as a judgement about the things which are not (cf. *Phdr.* 262b2–3; *Thet.* 167a7–8; 188c10–d10; 189b1–6) and false statement as a statement about the things which are not (cf. *Euthd.* 284b1–c6; *Cra.* 429d5–6).

9 Most commentators have not paid attention to T1's shift from an account of false judgement as a judgement that judges the things which are not to an account of false judgement that distinguishes between false affirmative judgements, which judge the things which are not, and negative judgements, which judge the things which are. In Crivelli 2012, 62–3 it is suggested that the shift might be due to the second account's being more apt to being brought under Plato's solution at 259d9–264b5 (while 'Theaetetus is flying' is false because flying is not about Theaetetus, 'Theaetetus is not seated' is false because seated is about Theaetetus). However, this suggestion is open to two objections: first, the sophist might refuse to concede a move that eases the solution; secondly, granted that negative kinds are acknowledged in the Sophist (cf. Crivelli 2012, 204–14), the first account would also be apt to being brought under Plato's solution at 259d9–264b5 ('Theaetetus is not seated' is false because not-seated is not about Theaetetus).

precisely because they are negative, ‘judge the things which are not’ in that they portray things as not being. However, this solution is unsatisfactory because it saddles the *Sophist* passage with an unwelcome ambiguity. For, if the solution suggested were on the right track, the problem faced by Plato would resemble the difficulty one might formulate by saying: ‘I cannot go to the bank since it is Saturday and moreover the police have sealed off the area around the river because a crime took place there’.

A secondary puzzle posed by the Sophist’s account of falsehood in terms of not-being. Passage T1 also presents a further, secondary puzzle. The description of false judgement as ‘judging the contraries of the things which are’ (Pl. *Sph.* 240d6–7) comes as a surprise. It is not inferred from the claim that a false judgement judges the things which are not — rather, it is the premiss from which that claim is inferred, at 240d9–10. In other words, it is because it judges ‘the contraries of the things which are’ that a false judgement judges the things which are not; it is not because it judges the things which are not that a false judgement judges ‘the contraries of the things which are’. Thus, the idea that a false judgement judges ‘the contraries of the things which are’ is treated as basic, almost as axiomatic. Why should one accept it?

II. The Parmenides on being and truth

The main puzzle solved. A passage from the *Parmenides* suggests a solution of the main puzzle. In a nutshell, the *Parmenides* passage makes it plausible to assume that false negative statements (and false negative judgements) also are concerned with the things which are not but can in the same breath be described as concerned with the things which are.

The *Parmenides* passage comes from the dialogue’s second half, which contains eight deductions: the first four from the positive hypothesis that the one is, the last four from the negative hypothesis that the one is not. Of the first four deductions from the positive hypothesis that the one is, the first two concentrate on the results that concern the one itself while the last two on those that concern other things. Within these two pairs, one member spells out positive results, the other negative ones. The group of the last four deductions is similarly structured. Thus, of the last four deductions from the negative hypothesis that the one is not, the first two concentrate on the results that concern the one itself while the last two on those that concern other things. Within these two pairs, one member spells out positive results, the other negative ones. The passage I intend to focus on comes from

the fifth deduction, namely the first of the four that start from the negative hypothesis that the one is not. It spells out results that concern the one itself and are positive. Here is the passage:

T3 – Καὶ μὴν καὶ οὐσίας γε δεῖ αὐτὸ μετέχειν πῃ. – Πῶς
 δῆ; – "Ἐγειν αὐτὸ δεῖ οὔτως ὡς λέγομεν. εἰ γάρ μὴ οὔτως ἔχει,
 οὐκ ἂν ἀληθῆ λέγοιμεν ἡμεῖς λέγοντες τὸ ἐν μὴ εἶναι. εἰ
 δὲ ἀληθῆ, δῆλον ὅτι ὄντα αὐτὰ λέγομεν. ή οὐχ οὔτως; –
 Οὔτω μὲν οὖν. – Ἐπειδὴ δέ φαμεν ἀληθῆ λέγειν, ἀνάγκη
 ήμīν φάναι καὶ ὄντα λέγειν. – Ἀνάγκη. – "Εστιν ἄρα, ὡς
 ἔοικε, τὸ ἐν οὐκ ὄν. εἰ γάρ μὴ ἔσται μὴ ὄν, ἀλλά πῃ τοῦ
 εἶναι ἀνήσει πρὸς τὸ μὴ εἶναι, εὐθὺς ἔσται ὄν. – Παντάπασι
 μὲν οὖν. – Δεῖς ἄρα αὐτὸ δεσμὸν ἔχειν τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τὸ εἶναι
 μὴ ὄν, εἰ μέλλει μὴ εἶναι, ὁμοίως ὥσπερ τὸ ὄν τὸ μὴ ὄν
 ἔχειν μὴ εἶναι, ἵνα τελέως αὖ [εἶναι]¹⁰ ή. οὔτως γάρ ἂν τὸ τε
 ὅν μάλιστ' ἄν εἴη καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν οὐκ ἄν εἴη, μετέχοντα τὸ
 μὲν ὄν οὐσίας τοῦ εἶναι ὄν, μὴ οὐσίας δὲ τοῦ <μὴ> εἶναι μὴ
 ὄν, εἰ μέλλει τελέως εἶναι, τὸ δὲ μὴ ὄν μὴ οὐσίας μὲν τοῦ μὴ
 εἶναι [μὴ] ὄν, οὐσίας δὲ τοῦ εἶναι μὴ ὄν, εἰ καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν αὖ
 τελέως μὴ ἔσται. – Ἀληθέστατα. 3

– Moreover, it [sc. the one that is not] must somehow partake also of being.¹¹ – How? – It must keep in the way in which we state <it>; for, if it does not keep in this way, we would not state the truth when we state that the one is not; but, if <we state> the truth, clearly we state the things

10 I follow Shorey 1891 in deleting the second occurrence of 'εἶναι' at 162a6 (another possibility contemplated by Shorey is to replace it with 'ὄν'), in inserting 'μὴ' at 162a8, and in deleting the first occurrence of 'μῆ' at 162b2. Burnet 1900 and Kahn 1981, 117 adopt all three of Shorey's emendations, while Diès 1923 and Moreschini 1966 stand by the text of the MSS. Gill 2002 defends the text of the MSS. Her defence is interesting and worthy of careful study because it gives Plato a coherent position. Adopting it would not go against the main claims of the present study. I cannot address the issue with the care it deserves. I restrict myself to the observation that Gill's proposal seems to sit uneasily with the 'γάρ' at 162a6, which suggests that the cases thereby introduced pick up what precedes. Those who are convinced by Gill's defence of the text of the MSS may adopt it without finding in it evidence against the interpretation proposed in the present study.

11 I render 'οὐσία' by 'being'. This is not ideal because I employ 'being' also in rendering 'ὄν' and 'εἶναι', but, as far as I can see, there are no better options: 'essence' cannot do because it has acquired a technical meaning that goes beyond its etymological connection with the Latin verb for 'to be'; 'existence' would be even worse because there is no reason to think that the existential use of 'εἶναι' is involved in the passage.

which are themselves. Isn't it so? – It is so.¹² – And since we say that we state the truth, it is necessary for us to say also that we state things which are. – It is necessary. – So, it seems, the one is not-being:¹³ for, if it will not be not-being, but will let somehow go of being in relation to not-being, it will immediately be being. – By all means. – It must therefore have being not-being as a link to not-being, if it is bound not to be, just as what is <must> have not-being not-being [sc. as a link to not-being], in order completely to be. For, this is how what is would be to the greatest extent and what is not would not be, what is by partaking of being in order to be being.¹⁴ on the one hand, and of not-being in order not to be not-being on the other, if it is bound completely to be, what is not <by partaking> of not-being in order not to be being, on the one hand, and of being in order to be not-being on the other, if what is not also will completely not be. – Most true. (Pl. *Prm.* 161e3–162b3)

Passage T3 may be divided into three parts: the first (161e3–162a1) uses the concept of truth to argue that whoever makes a true statement states the things which are; the second (162a1–6) introduces the idea of both being and not-being operating as links between the referent of a statement and not-being treated as a complementing property; and the third (162a6–b3) considers both being and not-being operating as links between the referent of a statement and both being and not-being treated as complementing properties.

In the first part (161e3–162a1), Parmenides appeals to a ‘comparative’ account of truth, according to which a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated (I use ‘to keep’ as a translation of ‘ἔχειν’¹⁵ in order to avoid using the verb ‘to be’, which comes on the scene in the immediate sequel). ‘Comparative’ accounts of truth are widespread in Plato.¹⁶ In

12 Parmenides’ question (‘Isn’t it so?’, 161e6) and Aristotle’s answer (‘It is so’, 161e7) provide a sort of ‘pragmatic confirmation’ of the point just made, namely that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated.

13 Since in Greek there is no indefinite article, the translation here could also be ‘... the one is a not-being’, where ‘not-being’ is treated as a noun-phrase (similarly with other analogous points of the English translation). I prefer avoiding the article and to treat ‘not-being’ as an adjectival phrase.

14 Following Shorey 1891, 352, I take the four articular infinitives in the genitive (‘τοῦ εἶναι ὄν’, ‘τοῦ μὴ εἶναι μὴ ὄν’, ‘τοῦ μὴ εἶναι ὄν’, and ‘τοῦ εἶναι μὴ ὄν’) to be final infinitives (cf. Smyth 1956, 451, Shorey mentions *Grg.* 457e5 and *R.* 7. 518d5–7 as further Platonic examples of this construction). My interpretation would hold also if they were treated as possessive genitives, but such a construal sits uneasily with the absence of the article in front of ‘οὐσίας’ and ‘μὴ οὐσίας’ (if they were possessive genitives, one would expect ‘τῆς οὐσίας’ and ‘τῆς μὴ οὐσίας’).

15 I am appealing to the use of ‘to keep’ displayed in sentences like ‘He is keeping well’ (meaning ‘He is still in good shape’).

16 Cf. *Ap.* 38a7; *Chrm.* 161a10; *Hp.Ma.* 282a4; 284e8–9; 300b3; *Hp.Mi.* 367a5; *Men.* 78cl–2; 79a2; 96c2; 99b10; *Smp.* 201c7; *Phd.* 68c4; 73a8–9; 102d3–4; 114d1–2; *Euthd.* 281e1–2; 284c7–d7; 285e9–286a3; *Cra.* 384c8–9; 385b7–8; 423a7; 440a5; *R.* 5. 474b2; 477b10–11; 478a6; *Prm.* 128e5–6; *Sph.* 255d8; *Lg.* 10. 893e5.

the present passage an account of this sort is appealed to in order to justify the claim that a true statement states the things which are. Parmenides is probably employing the predicative elliptical use of ‘to be’: granted that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, it is tempting to infer that a statement is true just if the entity referred to *is* what the statement attributes to it, and this may be succinctly formulated by saying that a true statement states the things which are (at this stage the predicative-elliptical use of ‘to be’ comes in: a true statement states, i.e. refers to,¹⁷ the things which are ‘what the statement attributes to them’).¹⁸ This holds also for a negative statement which states about the one that it is not: if such a statement is true, the one keeps as the statement states it, i.e. is what the statement attributes to it, and therefore is not-being (because what the statement attributes to the one is precisely not-being). The dialogue’s speakers, being presently committed to the truth of the statement that the one is not (cf. ‘... we say that we state the truth’, 161e7), are committed also to the one’s being not-being, and therefore to its being (cf. ‘... it is necessary for us to say also that we state things which are’, 161e7–162a1).

In the second part (162a1–6), Parmenides first argues that the one must be not-being. His argument is per absurdum: if the one ‘will not be not-being, but will let somehow go of being in relation to not being’,¹⁹ it will immediately be being’ (162a2–3). Parmenides then introduces the idea of a link to not-being, where not-being is a complementing property to which an object can be linked. He distinguishes two ways in which an object can have a link to not-being. On the one hand, an object can have being operating as a link that connects it with not-being, by being not-being. This happens in the case

17 Cf. note 2 above.

18 According to Kahn 1981, 116–7, the occurrences of forms of ‘to be’ at 161e6 and 162a1 are applied to propositions expressed by complete sentences and therefore involve the veridical use of ‘to be’, whereby the verb means something like ‘to be the case’ and has no complement (not even understood). This solution is surely possible. But it sits uneasily with the inference drawn by Parmenides, namely that ‘the one is not-being’ (162a1–2): here ‘is’ is clearly predicative. The point becomes even clearer in the argument’s sequel, where the idea that being functions as a link is introduced.

19 I construe the ‘πρός’ at 162a3 with the preceding ‘τοῦ εἶναι’ and I take it to introduce its complement, namely ‘τὸ μὴ εἶναι’: this is the interpretation of Heindorf 1806, 286 and Allen 1997, 57. Stallbaum 1839, 455, Cornford 1939, 226, and Kahn 1981, 116 construe this ‘πρός’ with ‘ἀνήσει’ (162a3) and take it to express the direction in which the one goes when it ‘lets go’ of being. I find the use of ‘πρός’ in combination ‘ἀνήσει’ linguistically hard; and construing the ‘πρός’ with ‘τοῦ εἶναι’ provides an introduction to the idea of being functioning as a link. Cf. also the ‘εἰς’ at 162b5. However, if the alternative translation were preferred, nothing substantial would change.

of what is not: what is not is not-being.²⁰ On the other hand, an object can have not-being operating as a link that connects it with not-being, by not being not-being. This happens in the case of what is: what is is-not not-being. The idea of being and not-being operating as links brings to one's mind the fact that in the *Sophist* (253c1–3, cf. 256b2–3) Plato seems to distinguish two types of vowel-kinds, namely those responsible for mixture and those responsible for division. In the present *Parmenides* passage the concept of a link is introduced as the opposite of that of 'letting go', mentioned at 162a3.

In the third part (162a6–b3), Parmenides offers a full description of all the possible situations that may arise both with respect to what is and with respect to what is not. What is partakes both of 'being in order to be being' (162a8), i.e. of the being that is the first component (the 'linking' component) within the concept of being being, and of 'not being in order not to be not-being' (162a8–b1), i.e. of the not-being that is the first component (again, the 'linking' component) within the concept of not-being not-being. In other words, what is partakes both of being, in that it *is* being, and of not-being, in that it *is-not* not-being. Parallel considerations apply to what is not. What is not partakes both of 'not being in order not to be being' (162b1–2), i.e. of the not-being that is the first component (the 'linking' component) within the concept of not-being being, and of 'being in order to be not-being' (162b2), i.e. of the being that is the first component (again, the 'linking' component) within the concept of being not-being. In other words, what is not partakes both of not-being, in that it *is-not* being, and of being, in that it *is* not-being. A consequence (on which Parmenides does not linger, but is interesting with a view to the painfully detailed arguments of the *Sophist*) is that what is partakes of not-being and what is not partakes of being.²¹

In Parmenides' argumentation, being and not-being operate as links in that they are counter-parts of, respectively, true and false statements (this is an implicit consequence of the way in which the idea that the one which is not is not-being was introduced in the first part). Thus, for every statement *s*,

20 Cf. *Sph.* 258c2–3; *Arist. Metaph.* Γ2, 1003b10; Z4, 1030a25–6; *Rh.* 2.24, 1402a4–5.

21 Cf. Kahn 1981, 117.

if [1] *s* is true, then

- [1a] if what *s* attributes is being, then *s*'s referent *is* in that it *is* being
- [1b] if what *s* attributes is not-being, then *s*'s referent *is* in that it *is not* being

if [2] *s* is false, then

- [2a] if what *s* attributes is being, then *s*'s referent *is not* in that it *is-not* being
- [2b] if what *s* attributes is not-being, then *s*'s referent *is not* in that it *is-not* not-being

In the above schemata, all the occurrences of 'being' can (though need not) be regarded as involving the predicative-elliptical use of 'to be' (in other words, all occurrences of 'being' can be replaced with 'being what *s* attributes to it').

Both case [1a] and (most importantly) case [2b] are treated by Parmenides as cases where the statement's referent may be described as being: the referent may be described as being both because the referent is being (case [1a]) and because it is-not not-being (case [2b]). In parallel fashion, case [1b] and case [2a] are both treated by Parmenides as cases where the referent may be described as not being: the referent may be described as not being both because the referent is not-being (case [1b]) and because it is-not being (case [2a]).

The account of false statement in [2] implies that the description of a false statement as stating the things which are not can be preserved even when in one of the cases contemplated the false statement can be described also as stating the things which are: if what the false statement attributes is being (i.e. if the false statement is affirmative), then it states the things which are not because its referent is-not being; if what the false statement attributes is not-being (i.e. if the false statement is negative), then it states the things which are not because its referent is-not not-being, but in this case the statement also states the things which are because its referent, by not-being not-being, is. The same account holds, of course, for false judgement.

If the bare occurrences of the verb 'to be' in the *Sophist*'s description of false judgement and false statement in passage T1 are understood as cases of the predicative-elliptical use of the verb,²² then the result just described provides a solution for the main puzzle generated by the passage: also in the case where the false judgement or false statement is described as concerned

22 This is the fourth and last use of 'to be' mentioned above, in the paragraph to n. 5.

with the things which are, the judgement and the statement in fact deal with the things which are not, namely with the things which are-not not-beings. This vindicates the initial impression that the description of false judgement and false statement as dealing with the things which are not can be regarded as covering all false judgements and false statements, and it shows also that the *Sophist*'s worry about the possibility of false judgement and false statement prompted by their connection with the things which are not is not misplaced.

The secondary puzzle solved. This solution for the main puzzle raised by passage T1 suggests one also for the other, secondary puzzle. In correspondence with the 'comparative' account of truth, according to which a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, Plato might be operating with a 'comparative' account of falsehood, according to which a statement is false just if the entity referred to keeps unlike what is stated. It might be the case that a 'comparative' account of falsehood roughly along these lines lies behind the premiss of the inference at lines 240d6–10 of passage T1: 'a false judgement will judge the contraries of the things which are' (240d6–7) in that the judgement's referent is unlike what the judgement posits it to be; for this reason, 'a false judgement judges the things which are not' (240d9). This would explain the otherwise somewhat surprising beginning of the inference, i.e. the fact that it starts from the premiss that a false judgement is concerned with the *contraries* of the things which are.

Why would the Visitor introduce the concept of contrariety in order to describe the situation of the cognizer judging otherwise than how the things are? The most plausible answer is that the difference between what the cognizer is judging and the condition of the object he or she is judging about concerns attributes that are competing for the same slot: for instance, different sizes (the object is small but the cognizer judges it to be large), or colours (the object is yellow but the cognizer judges it to be red), or biological kinds (the object is a mammal but the cognizer judges it to be a fish). In such situations, the attributes involved are typically reciprocally incompatible, and may therefore be described as 'contraries'.²³

23 The use of the expression 'contrary' ('ἐναντίος') to mean 'inconsistent' or 'incompatible' is widely attested in Plato (cf. *La.* 196b4; *Prt.* 339b9; 340b3; etc.). It should not be confused with its use to mean 'polarly opposed' (attested, for instance, at *Sph.* 257b3–10). Some commentators think that the connection between contrariety and negation in T1, at 240d6–10, is linked to the discussion of polar opposition and negation at 257b1–c4. This is unlikely because 257b1–c4 describes a mistaken conception of the

III. Two ways of understanding the claim that truths speak of the world as it is

Why two different descriptions of falsehood? One difficult but important question remains: why, in passage T1, do the two inquirers offer in immediate succession two quite different descriptions of falsehood, one of which claims that all false statements and judgements (both affirmative and negative) are concerned with the things which are not, while the other claims that false affirmative statements and judgements are concerned with the things which are not whereas false negative statements and judgements are concerned with the things which are? The answer to this question is bound to be speculative because the passage gives no hint of an answer. A plausible guess is that the two descriptions of falsehood are born of two different ways of developing the ‘comparative’ account of truth, according to which a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated (I concentrate on statements, the corresponding treatment of judgements can be easily worked out by extrapolation).

The first way in which the ‘comparative’ account of truth can be developed may be seen in passage T3: granted that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, it is temptingly easy to infer that a statement is true just if the entity referred to *is* what the statement attributes to it (it suffices to replace ‘ἔχειν οὐτως ως’ with ‘εἶναι τοῦτο ὅ’). Since an affirmative statement attributes being to its referent, an affirmative statement is true just if its referent *is* being; since a negative statement attributes not-being to its referent, a negative statement is true just if its referent *is not* being. In all cases, a statement (affirmative or negative) is true just if its referent *is*, *sc.* *is* something or other. This may be succinctly formulated by saying that every true statement (affirmative or negative) states the things which are. What corresponds to the ‘comparative’ account of truth is a ‘comparative’ account of falsehood: a statement is false just if the entity referred to keeps unlike what is stated. From this it is temptingly easy to infer that a statement is false just if the entity referred to *is not* what the statement attributes to it. Since an affirmative statement attributes being to its referent, an affirmative statement is false just if its referent *is-not* being; since a negative statement attributes not-being to its referent, a negative statement is false just if its referent *is-not* not-being. In all cases, a statement (affirmative or negative) is false just if its referent *is not*, *sc.* *is not*

relationship between polar opposition and negation (specifically, the phenomenon of neg-raising) while 240d6–10 displays a valid inference (if *x* is the contrary of so-and-so then *x* is not so-and-so).

something or other. This may be succinctly formulated by saying that every false statement (affirmative or negative) states the things which are not.

The second way in which the ‘comparative’ account of truth can be developed treats the comparison as bearing on the affirmative or negative quality of the statement: granted that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, it is temptingly easy to infer that an affirmative statement, which states that its referent is in a certain condition, is true just if its referent is in that condition, whereas a negative statement, which states that its referent is not in a certain condition, is true just if its referent is not in that condition. Again, to the ‘comparative’ account of truth there corresponds a ‘comparative’ account of falsehood: a statement is false just if the entity referred to keeps unlike the way it is stated. It is then temptingly easy to infer that an affirmative statement, which states that its referent is in a certain condition, is false just if its referent is not in that condition, whereas a negative statement, which states that its referent is not in a certain condition, is false just if its referent is in that condition. My speculative suggestion is that the two descriptions of falsehood offered in passage T1 derive from two ways of developing the ‘comparative’ accounts of truth and falsehood. Passage T3 shows that the outcomes of the two developments are reciprocally consistent.

Between Aristotle and Frege. The main difference between the two ways of developing the ‘comparative’ accounts of truth and falsehood depends on how the relationship between statements and their affirmative or negative quality is conceived. In the first development, all statements are in a way regarded as basically affirmative in that they all attribute a certain trait, which can be either the trait of being or the trait of not-being. In the second development, the difference between the affirmative and negative quality of a statement is regarded as closer to the statement’s core, as pertaining to ways of stating: it is not the case that all statements are basically affirmative, rather some statements are basically affirmative whereas others are basically negative. In the second development, there seem to be two fundamental speech-acts of stating, namely affirming (i.e. attributing) and denying (i.e. something like subtracting).

The point of view on which the second development is based seems to be close to Aristotle, who distinguishes affirmation and negation as speech-acts

of stating-about and stating-away-from.²⁴ And it is not perhaps by chance that one finds again in Aristotle the description of truth and falsehood that is typical of the second development: an affirmation is true just if its referent is, false just if its referent is not; a negation is true just if its referent is not, false just if its referent is.²⁵ By contrast, the point of view on which the first development is based brings to a modern reader's mind the position of Frege, who argued against the thesis that there is a special speech-act of denial corresponding to negative statements, acknowledged only one assertoric speech-act, namely assertion, and located negation in the propositional content (which, for Plato, would have come down to the property attributed because in his view the negative particle 'not' attaches to predicates rather than to complete sentences).²⁶ Plato appears to stand between Aristotle and Frege in that he allows both ways of developing the 'comparative' accounts of truth and falsehood.

24 Cf. Arist. *Int.* 5, 17a20–21; 6, 17a25–26; 7, 17b38–18a4; *APr.* 1.30, 46a14–15; 32, 47b3; 2.15, 64a13–15; *APo.* 1.2, 72a13–14; *Metaph.* Γ6, 101b19–20; Θ2, 1046b13–15.

25 Cf. Arist. *Int.* 6, 17a26–29; *Metaph.* Γ7, 101b25–27; E4, 1027b20–23.

26 Cf. Frege 1918–19, 151–54.

